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ABSTRACT

Leaders in business and industry are demanding workers who not only can read and write but can think creatively and critically and solve problems. Federal- and state-funded programs and volunteer organizations are involved with adult literacy. Increasingly, corporations are funding adult literacy projects. Adults read for different reasons than they did when in school. Their reading relates to work-related tasks; they read to keep up with current events or for their own enjoyment. A first goal of an adult literacy program should be to enhance the self-esteem and self-concept of low-literate adults. Appropriate instructional strategies are the language experience approach; cooperative learning; dialogue journals; books on tape; tutor as a model for oral reading; cloze procedure; graphic organizers; Know, Want to Know, Learned; and computers. Effective assessment methods are standardized and competency tests, checklists, and portfolios. Programs that show the diversity of adult literacy programs in the United States are intergenerational adult literacy projects; Project: Learn, a literature-based adult literacy program; Siskiyou County READ (Reading, Education, and Development) Project, a rural adult literacy effort; workplace literacy programs; Project Literacy United States; and volunteer efforts. (Nine organizational sources of information and 28 references are appended.) (YLB)

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Achieving Adult Literacy

Pamela J. Farris

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Achieving Adult Literacy

by
Pamela J. Farris

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Introduction

I'm married and we have two boys, ages 6 and 2. I'm employed . . . for 14 years as a forklift truck driver. I have been in the Literacy Program for almost 3 years. My wife, Michelle, motivated me to join the program. Illiteracy is a major problem in the U.S. because no one wants to admit it.

– Rodney (Iowa Literacy Council 1991)

Rodney is typical of many in adult literacy programs. Like Rodney, many are encouraged by their spouses or other family members to enroll, while others recognize the need to develop their skills further in order to advance their careers or even to maintain their same position. When Rodney states that "illiteracy is a major problem in the U.S. because no one wants to admit it," he makes a significant point. Illiterate adults do find it difficult to admit that they have problems with reading and writing. On the other hand, literate adults often fail to acknowledge that we have a literacy problem in this country and do little to help improve the situation.

The concept of adult literacy is elusive because, as our society becomes more complex and technological, the literacy skills needed to function have become more complex and sophisticated. As a result, our concepts of literacy have expanded during the past 20 to 30 years to include more than basic reading and writing skills. The focus now is achieving a level of literacy that allows one to function successfully in the workplace and in the many tasks of daily living.

Adult literacy will continue to be redefined as society changes. In addition to workplace skills and survival skills of daily living, literacy involves creativity and critical thinking. It involves the skills of how to find information and how to communicate with others. At its highest level, literacy involves enjoying literature and creative self-expression.

Other terms used in discussions of adult literacy are "functional literacy" and "occupational literacy." We say a person is "functionally illiterate" if he or she is unable to perform simple, everyday tasks such as taking a driver's license test, completing a job or credit application form, or balancing a checkbook. "Occupational literacy" refers to those skills needed for a specific job. A person may be competent for a particular job; but if the nature of that job changes or if a person wants to change jobs and does not meet the skill level needed for that job, then we say that person is "occupationally illiterate."

This fastback will examine the problem of adult illiteracy in the U.S., address its social and economic implications, review some tested instructional strategies to use with adult illiterates, and describe some successful adult literacy programs.

The Need for Adult Literacy

Leaders in business and industry are demanding workers with higher-level skills, workers who can not only read and write but can think creatively and critically and solve problems. According to Chall (1990), about 60% of the total student population and 80% of minority students fall below the literacy level needed in our modern technological information age. While these percentages seems to be extremely high, there is ample evidence that the problem is serious and has become a major concern at the national level.

For instance, businesses cite incidences of employees who made errors costing them hundreds or thousands of dollars because of lack of basic skills. Below are some examples:

- An immigrant factory worker who recognized a problem on the assembly line but failed to report it to his supervisor because of his limited English language skills.
- An insurance clerk who paid $2,200 for a claim of $22.00 because she did not understand decimals.
- A manager who depended on his wife to write his reports, even if it meant going home during the middle of the day for her to do them.
- A hard working but illiterate greenhouse employee who put herbicide rather than fertilizer on poinsettias because he couldn't read the label on the container, thus ruining the entire stock in-

ler Corporation spends $117 million a year teaching its employees reading, writing, and computing skills, as well as other job-related skills. And the Chrysler Foundation has made literacy its principal focus (Arizona Department of Education 1990).

tended to be sold during the Christmas season and nearly bankrupting the greenhouse owner.

Clearly, the need for literacy skills is obvious. According to Diehl (1980), 99% of all workers need to read in order to accomplish their job task; this comes out to an average of 113 minutes of reading time per day. For those who lack basic literacy skills, the outlook is bleak. One out of three mothers receiving AFDC assistance (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) is unable to read. People with fewer than six years of schooling are four times more likely to end up on welfare than are those who have completed at least nine years of schooling (Arizona Department of Education 1990). Fifty-six million adults in the U.S. have not completed high school and do not have high school diplomas. Because they lack the basic skills, many are unable to function successfully in today's society or earn a decent living for themselves and their families. Those lacking these basic skills will be passed over by those more qualified to do the job (Kansas State Department of Education 1989).

Since the launching of Sputnik in 1957, technological advancements have increased at a tremendous rate. Within the past decade, robotics have eliminated many manufacturing jobs, particularly in the auto industry. Today's worker no longer can rely on manual labor to provide an adequate wage. As U.S. corporations seek to increase productivity to meet increasing international competition, they are faced with a scarcity of workers with the analytical and problem-solving skills needed for today's technological workforce. For example, IBM rejects the job applications of 1,700 people each month because they lack the basic skills to do the required work (Arizona Department of Education 1990).

In recent years, several large corporations have found it necessary to develop their own occupational literacy programs to train employees in job skills, including basic literacy skills. Lee Iacocca, chairman of Chrysler Corporation, is greatly disturbed about the situation, saying, "I'm getting more scared every day." In the meantime, the Chrys-

Support for Adult Literacy

Many of today's adult literacy programs originated with the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act, a job training and education bill, and have continued under the Hawkins-Stafford Act of 1988. These programs have helped adults acquire the skills needed to complete high school. In addition, the Hawkins-Stafford Act helps adults to become employable, productive, and responsible citizens. Also, each state department of education has a division devoted to adult literacy. The states fund programs operated at the local community level.

In addition to federal- and state-funded programs, several volunteer organizations are involved with adult literacy. These include religious organizations, service clubs, and community groups. While these programs vary in structure, they have been very effective in working with illiterate adults in community after community. The underlying premise of these volunteer programs is one caring adult helping another adult learn to read and write. The result is a foundation on which future learning can build.

Increasingly, corporations are funding adult literacy projects. For example, the Chrysler Foundation, Coca Cola, Toyota, and others have funded literacy programs operated by community agencies, schools, and universities. Some businesses have developed their own on-site literacy programs as a convenience to their workers. In some instances, child care is provided free or for a nominal charge.

In 1991, a report from the U.S. Department of Labor Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, chaired by former Secretary of Labor William Brock, called on businesses to help schools train future workers in necessary job skills (Brock 1991). In addition to the basic skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, businesses consider creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, and reasoning as fundamental skills for today's workforce.

The Business Council for Effective Literacy (BCEL) is an organization that advises businesses on setting up their own corporate literacy programs as well as supporting local, state, and national literacy programs. BCEL provides both large corporations and small businesses with reports on successful literacy programs and publishes a directory of resources. In addition, BCEL publishes guidelines for on-site employee literacy programs and fund-raising ideas for volunteer groups (Business Council for Effective Literacy 1989).

In establishing a corporate literacy program, the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education as well as BCEL outline essential components for a successful program. These include clearly stated goals and projected outcomes for both the company and the participating employees, support from the top management, continuous feedback from participants in the program, and instructional methods and materials appropriate to participants' goals and needs. Like any educational program, evaluation data should be used to modify the program in order to improve its effectiveness (U.S. Department of Labor and U.S. Department of Education 1988; Business Council for Effective Literacy 1989).

Reasons for Acquiring Literacy

Adults read for different reasons than they did when in school. While some of their reading relates to work-related tasks, the average adult reads primarily to keep up with what is happening through newspapers and magazines. They read for their own enjoyment, and much of what they read is related to personal interests. They read the obituary column to find out who in the community has passed away; they read supermarket ads for the weekly specials; or they read the sports page to find out how their favorite team did in yesterday's game. But there are others who have special reasons for wanting to read. Take Sharon, a grandmother in northern Illinois, who is enrolled in an adult literacy program. Her motivation for reading is best expressed in her own words:

> When I went to school, I went all the way up to the third grade. They put me back because they said I was slow, and they put me in special education for two years. Back then is when it first started. . . . I feel I learned more from my husband because he used to read to me. I decided to come back and learn to read on my own because I am not getting any younger, and I feel I should learn to do things on my own. I have a granddaughter now and I would like to be able to read stories to her. I was not able to do this with my two boys (Emerson 1991).

Sharon's desire to read stories to her granddaughter was one of the primary reasons for her joining the program at the Rockford Area

Literacy Council. For her, becoming literate meant she could read bedtime stories to her granddaughter, something she could not do with her own sons when they were children.

Literacy and Self-Esteem

Many adult illiterates are too ashamed to admit that they cannot read; and because of their poor self-esteem, they tend to believe they do not have the ability to learn to read and write. By enrolling in a literacy program, they have taken a first significant step to enhance their self-esteem. However, unless they receive encouragement and achieve some success early in the program, they tend to drop out.

A study of 54 adults enrolled in a literacy program in California found that their primary reason for seeking assistance was to improve their self-esteem. Most of them had been in the slow reading groups in school. All had suffered from either neglect or physical abuse in childhood. None of them could ever remember being read to at home. One man from a large family could not remember ever talking at length with another family member. He was grateful for food and shelter, but as a child he did not believe he deserved to be talked to by others (Rosow 1988).

Sometimes the lives of adult illiterates are filled with anguish. Listen to Erik's story:

> I worked in a small industry and lived with my three girls and son. I have a problem with reading and writing. I have had a problem with reading all my life. It has caused trouble in my life. In 1986, I had a nervous breakdown. I relied upon my mother and my wife to read and write for me.
>
> With bankruptcy and a divorce, it looked grim, but the doctor told me there was help at the GED room at the college. I had no car so I walked to the college and got started. With work and the children, school came third. Several times I stopped and started. On November 9, 1988, at 8:33 p.m., my home burned and my son died in the fire.

It was my worst time. After a long time I got on with my life with my three girls.

I do not know the day I started to school again but I did. I am starting Book 4, and in November I will start a machine class. There is hope for us who cannot read or write.

P.S. I have a high school diploma. Why? (Pennsylvania Department of Education 1991)

Like Erik, Judy's story is one of many low points. Married at a young age without her parents' approval and now the mother of four children, Judy came to the Adult Resource and Training Center in Manhattan, Kansas, from the local Crisis Center. Judy's tutor was startled when she first met her. She had never encountered a battered woman before. Judy's arm was in a sling, her eyes blackened, and much of her body was covered with bruises. This was not the first time Judy had been physically beaten.

Judy spent many days at the center just conversing with the secretary about her problems, unable to focus on studying. As time passed, her depression diminished and her ability to concentrate on the tasks at hand improved. Her first test scores were quite high, raising her self-confidence. On receiving her GED, Judy called her parents to notify them of her success. They were delighted and asked her to return home to live with them while she attended college. After divorcing her husband, Judy moved in with her parents and is currently attending Kansas State University on a Pell Grant (Kansas State Department of Education 1991).

Dawn became pregnant, got married, and left school at the end of her sophomore year. She claimed her high school was not supportive. Her primary goals then were to be a wife and a mother. As the mother of a special needs child, Dawn found herself devoting most of her hours to taking care of her son, teaching him to take care of himself. Shy and with little self-confidence, Dawn could not even see that what she had accomplished with her son had any value. Eventually, she entered the Bradford County (Pennsylvania) Action Litera-

cy Program. Her husband did not believe she would finish the program, but she persisted and passed the GED. While in the program, her peers would seek her advice and guidance for their own personal and academic problems. Gaining a new sense of confidence and self-worth, Dawn entered Mansfield University, majoring in social work, and plans to work as a children's counselor. In 1991, Dawn was honored as a "Champion of Literacy" by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (Pennsylvania Department of Education 1991).

A common element in the above case studies is the individual's low self-concept and lack of self-esteem. Overcoming this lack thus becomes the first goal of an adult literacy program. Typically, those who successfully complete the program are those who feel they are making progress. This in turn leads to a stronger, more positive self-concept as they experience success and their personal and career goals appear to be within their reach.

Instructional Strategies for Adult Literacy Programs

Those who work with adult illiterates should avoid using instructional strategies that are associated with past reading failure. For instance, many adult illiterates have been subjected to extensive phonics and sight word drills in elementary school but nevertheless failed to learn to read. Ironically, many adults who enroll in literacy programs expect, even demand, to be taught phonics, because they associate phonics with learning to read.

Phillip is a case in point. In his middle thirties, Phillip earned his living as a truck driver, covering routes in Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. He enrolled in a volunteer-staffed literacy program at his local library with the goal of getting his reading level to the point where he could pass the GED. His volunteer tutor, Tom, was a professor in the local college. Phillip was conscientious about attending the weekly sessions but preferred to work one-on-one with Tom rather than in a small group, where his weak reading skills would be exposed to others.

At the time, the prevalent method of adult literacy instruction was a combination of phonics and sight word drills and reading high interest/low vocabulary books. Phillip completed his phonics workbooks, and week after week Tom faithfully flashed the Dolch list of 220 basic sight words. Even after a year of working with Phillip, Tom could see only meager improvement. "It seemed like an insurmountable hurdle to overcome," said Tom.

What Tom did not know is that there are more appropriate instructional strategies for teaching adult illiterates, some of which have been adapted from elementary school reading approaches that link reading and writing, such as the language experience approach.

Language Experience Approach

The language experience approach (LEA) allows for greater individualization than does using basic literacy texts written for adults. This approach was developed originally for use with kindergartners and first-graders but works with adults as well. The student tells a story or incident to the tutor, who writes it down exactly as told. The tutor reads it back to the student, who then reads it aloud. Because the student is reading his own words, there is inherent interest in the text. And since the student's own oral language patterns are being read – grammatical errors and all – reading seems more natural, less stilted. In addition to the student's own stories, tutors can use such materials as newspapers and magazines with articles that have high interest for the reader. What is important is that the student is reading text that has personal meaning.

The student develops a personalized vocabulary bank by writing each word on a card. The cards are then grouped into categories to refer to when reading or writing. Every day the student writes in a journal using words from the vocabulary bank. If the student is not sure how to spell a word, he should be encouraged to approximate or "invent" a spelling. At this stage, perfection is not required. What is needed is for the student to gain some confidence in expressing himself, making the connection between reading and writing.

To illustrate the LEA approach, take the case of Jim, a farmer with limited reading and writing skills. Jim enrolled in a literacy program sponsored by the rural community center in his area. His tutor found few reading materials in the center that seemed appropriate for Jim; but as she got acquainted with him, she discovered that he was a country music fan like herself. He already knew many of the lyrics by

heart and sang along with recordings on the radio as he drove his pickup to do errands. As a beginning assignment, the tutor typed up the song lyrics for Jim to read. At first, Jim sang the words softly as he listened to the cassette tape, while at the same time reading the familiar lyrics typed on a sheet of paper. Gradually, Jim's reading vocabulary grew. The tutor also collected tractor advertisements from a local John Deere dealer and farm journals to use as reading material. Because he was a farmer, Jim was familiar with much of the terminology in the advertisements and articles, so it was easy to motivate him to learn to read text that had personal meaning for him.

Meaning-making is the central focus of literacy instruction. By having adult learners bring their previous knowledge and experience to the act of reading, they begin to assimilate new information from the printed page. This is what occurred in the case of Jim. The tutor used Jim's previous knowledge in the areas of country music and agriculture and built on that knowledge by selecting reading materials that were relevant to his primary interests.

It is always important for the tutor to acknowledge what the student already knows about reading, however minimal it may be. One tutor clipped ads from newspapers and magazines and brought a grocery bag containing the items featured in the ads. As she pulled each item from the bag, she asked her student to name it and then to match it with the ad. After naming 10 to 15 items and matching them with the ads, the student realized, "Hey, I already know a lot about reading." For the next session, the tutor asked the student to bring in ads from newspapers and magazines featuring brand names he could recognize.

The meaning-making approach with adults requires reading material that serves both a desire and a need. Students should be encouraged to bring in materials that they want to learn to read. These could be a driver's license manual, recipes, comic books, tabloids, or letters from relatives. Failure to provide relevant reading materials is a primary reason that three out of 10 adults enrolled in literacy programs

drop out prior to receiving 12 hours of instruction (Chisman and Campbell 1990).

Cooperative Learning

Another approach widely used in elementary school that can be adapted for adult literacy programs is cooperative learning. Two or three adult learners with common interests can work together on reading and writing assignments. They can read the same materials or different materials on the same topic and then discuss and share what they have learned. Or they can work as a team on a writing assignment, with one person serving as the recorder and the other dictating commentary based on a reading selection both have read. For the next assignment, they can switch roles so each gets a turn at writing.

Dialogue Journals

A dialogue journal is an effective technique for personalizing reading and writing with adult students. The student writes something on one page in a spiral notebook, and the tutor writes a response on the facing page. The journal entries might start out as a series of brief notes or letters to each other. The tutor's response should react to what the student has written, perhaps asking a question or sharing a personal experience, which continues the train of thought and extends the dialogue. A variation of the technique is to ask students to write a dialogue with the main character in a story they have just read, with the tutor responding as the character might have responded. Another variation is to have the student and the tutor talk about a book the student is reading. Thus the dialogue journal links reading and writing in a meaningful context.

Books on Tape

Many public libraries now offer books on tape covering a wide variety of topics. By using a cassette recorder at home or the tape deck

in a car, adult illiterates can hear how language is used while at the same time gaining useful information and enjoyment. Books on tape that have been made into movies are often appealing to adult illiterates. Even children's classics are more palatable for adults in this format. Hearing good models of oral reading will help students improve their own fluency in oral reading. Students also should be encouraged to make their own tapes. These may be as simple as retelling a joke they enjoyed or relating a bit of family history that has been handed down to them and that they want to preserve.

Tutor as a Model for Oral Reading

From time to time, the tutor should share items by reading aloud to the adult student. Reading a humorous letter to Dear Abby, an unusual event reported in the newspaper, or a short poem on the joys and problems of turning 40 provide occasions for modeling oral reading and sharing the pleasure of reading. This activity can be varied by having the tutor alternate with the student in reading a passage. For instance, the tutor can read a letter to Ann Landers and the student reads the reply. Another variation is to alternate reading lines in a book. The student reads the first sentence and the tutor reads the second, continuing to the end of the page.

Cloze Procedure

The cloze procedure requires preparing a page or more of text in which every seventh or tenth word is deleted. Then the student is asked to provide the missing words so that the text makes sense. This technique is useful in that it requires the student to use context clues and previous knowledge to determine what word belongs in the blank space.

Graphic Organizers

This technique is used to help adult students see relationships between concepts and thus aids in comprehension. It can be used with

both reading and writing assignments. Before reading on a topic, the tutor asks the student to brainstorm everything he knows about the topic. The tutor writes down words or phrases about the topic as the student mentions them, and then at the end of the brainstorming they organize the information into categories. For instance, a student preparing to read an article about Oklahoma, his native state, generated the following the words/phrases during the brainstorming: hot, lakes, dry, ranches, rodeos, oil, fishing, football, cattle. These were then categorized into five groupings: 1) cattle, ranches, rodeos; 2) fishing, lakes; 3) oil; 4) hot, dry; and 5) football. Thus, the learner could see relationships between ideas generated during the brainstorming. Graphic organizers can be used to introduce a group discussion on a reading selection or as a prewriting activity. Seeing their ideas presented in a graphic format helps students in the meaning-making process.

Know, Want to Know, Learned (KWL)

This strategy, developed by Donna Ogle (1986) for intermediate and secondary school students, has been adapted for use with adult students. KWL, like other techniques discussed above, uses the learner's prior knowledge to develop comprehension and to gain more knowledge. Prior to reading a selection, the student tells the tutor everything he knows about a subject. On a sheet of paper divided into three columns titled "Know," "Want to Know," and "Learned," the tutor records what the student knows in the first column. In the second column the tutor lists questions the student has about the topic to be read. After reading the passage, the student tells the tutor what he learned from the text; and this is recorded in the third column. Over time the student learns to use this technique when reading about any topic without help from the tutor.

Instructional Strategies for Occupational Literacy

Occupational literacy is those reading skills needed to function effectively in the workplace. It involves both the skills of acquiring

knowledge from reading and then applying that knowledge to job tasks. These skills will vary, of course, from occupation to occupation. For example, air conditioning/heating repair, auto mechanics, drafting, and appliance repair are jobs requiring skill in reading and interpreting charts, graphs, tables, diagrams, blueprints, and figures. Occupational literacy also requires knowledge of specialized vocabulary, unlike what students will encounter in the typical high school curriculum.

In a study comparing the quality and the quantity of reading in high school with reading on the job, Mikulecky (1982) found that the reading demands of workers exceeded those of high school students. Among his findings were: 1) on-the-job reading requires more time per day than does in-school reading; 2) workers read a wider variety of materials for specific purposes than do high school students; 3) workers view reading as more important to job success than do technical school students; and 4) workers do more reading focused on applications to specific job tasks, which high school students rarely, if ever, encounter.

Instructional strategies for occupational literacy should use materials that are job-specific. They should use workers' prior knowledge and experience in order to construct meaning, while also providing for specific skill development.

Use of Computers for Adult Literacy

Although computers have not been used widely in adult literacy programs to date, they do have great potential. Interactive software allows continuous and timely feedback to students. Students can practice alone and at their own pace. After mastering basic keyboarding skills, students can write, edit, and revise their own stories with greater facility than they can using pencil and paper. However, some caution is in order. Software must be selected carefully so that it is appropriate for the skills being taught. Also, computers are no substitute for one-on-one interaction needed for good teaching.

Assessment in Adult Literacy Programs

Because adult literacy programs have different goals, it is difficult to have a single assessment method. For instance, some deal with basic literacy; others are competency-based, such as GED preparation programs; while still others are job-related, occupational literacy programs. Another limiting factor is that many instructors in adult literacy programs are volunteers with only a few hours of training and therefore are not likely to be sophisticated in assessment techniques. Nevertheless, there are several assessment methods that have proven to be effective. Some are discussed below.

Standardized and Competency Tests

Many adult literacy programs use the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) or Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE) for assessing student progress. The test of General Educational Development (GED), the high school equivalency test, also is widely used. The addition of a writing sample for the GED will expand the range of skills tested. Other tests are being developed that will assess problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.

In addition to standardized tests, competency-based tests are used widely in adult literacy. These kinds of test are based on criteria related to a specific skill objective. The student must meet the criteria in order to be considered competent in a particular skill area.

Checklists

Checklists can be effective assessment instruments, particularly for skills-related objectives. The various skills objectives can be listed and then checked off by the instructor as the student demonstrates mastery of each skill.

Portfolios

Use of portfolios is relatively new to assessment in adult literacy programs. Examples of a student's work, selected by the student and the tutor, are dated and filed in a portfolio. At regular intervals, the tutor discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the work in the portfolio with the student, and new goals are established to challenge the student to improve further.

The portfolio might contain a listing of the books or articles read and the dates the reading was completed, samples of writing including photocopies of letters to relatives and friends, or even a dialogue journal. The student may want to include a list of children's books read as bedtime stories to his or her own children. The tutor's anecdotal records prepared after each tutoring session also might be a part of the portfolio. Because the portfolio is unique for each individual, it serves to personalize the assessment process.

An Overview of Adult Literacy Programs in the U.S.

Adult literacy programs in the U.S. take many forms. They differ not only in their design and structure but also in their clientele. Some serve inner-city populations, others are located in rural sites, and still others are based at factory sites. Following are brief descriptions that show the diversity of adult literacy programs in the U.S.

Intergenerational Adult Literacy Projects

Typically, adult illiterates have not had the kind of early literacy experiences that normal readers had as children, such as being read to at bedtime, being taught Mother Goose rhymes, being taken to the Story Hour at the local public library and perhaps checking out a book to take home. As a result, these adults often fail to provide their own children with these important early experiences, thus perpetuating the cycle of illiteracy. To break this cycle, some authorities in literacy training now are advocating programs that address adult and child literacy at the same time. The basic premise of these intergenerational programs is that the best way to foster the emergent literacy of children from families with low literacy levels is to work simultaneously on the parents' literacy skills.

Research on children's emergent literacy has long shown the importance of having adult reading models. The influential report, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al. 1985) maintains that

reading aloud to children is the single most important factor in preparing them to read. Yet, far too many children have parents who cannot even read them bedtime stories. However, recent research indicates that having adults read to their children benefits not only the children but the parents as well. The results suggest that those adults who read and discussed simple children's books with their own sons and daughters for as little as 10 minutes a day gained in their own comprehension and vocabulary scores, as did their children (Nickse, Speicher, and Buchek 1988).

In an attempt to break the cycle of generational illiteracy, several family literacy programs have been established. One example is the involvement of parents in Head Start and Chapter I programs. A more fully developed model is the Parent and Child Education (PACE) program in Kentucky. In this program, parents and their children ride the same school bus to school every day. While at school, the parents are involved in activities with their own children, as well as in activities designed solely for parents. The parents also serve as volunteers, supervising children in the lunch room and on the playground. Thus, the parents feel they are contributing to their children's learning as well as being involved in the school community. A similar program in North Carolina, called MOTHEREAD, involves parents in both the public schools and the Head Start program (Fingeret 1990).

Some companies also have recognized the need for involving the entire family in an intergenerational literacy program. Toyota has made a $2 million grant to the National Center for Family Literacy for a program called Toyota's Families for Learning, which began operation in September 1991.

The program's goal in bringing parents and their children together is to address both individual needs and the needs of the family as a unit. The Families for Learning model includes five components: 1) adult education, 2) early childhood education, 3) intergenerational activities, 4) parent support groups, and 5) human resource development. The program operates at sites selected on the basis of the

percentage of children living in poverty and the percentage of adults who lack literacy skills. Instructors for the program receive five days of training (National Center for Family Literacy 1991).

A Literature-Based Adult Literacy Program

PROJECT: LEARN, a volunteer literacy program based in Cleveland, Ohio, is part of the Laubach Literacy Action program. In this program, tutors work one-on-one with low-literacy adults. The program has developed a book club for its participants. Students read high interest/low vocabulary books, often including quality children's literature, and discuss it in a small group. Topics include social and family issues to which all of the students can relate (PROJECT: LEARN 1987).

A Rural Adult Literacy Program

The Siskiyou County READ (Reading, Education, and Development) Project began in 1983 in northern California. It is innovative in that it uses a radio program called READ radio to inform, entertain, and recruit adult literacy students through radio drama. Listeners follow along with the program by reading the Listener's Guide, which is available in local public libraries and schools. Because radio programming is relatively inexpensive to produce, this program does not require a large amount of funding. The drama and stories are broadcast from local radio stations (Reynolds and Reynolds 1988).

Workplace Literacy Programs

In 1979 Eastern Michigan University, with funding from a federal Right-to-Read Grant, established the Academy to retrain and re-educate thousands of auto workers. Classes are scheduled before and after shifts at nearby auto factories. The Academy is a non-traditional workplace literacy program in that it is based on collaborative learning. Students work together in groups in which they read, write, dis-

cuss, and solve problems. The focus is on using the strengths of the students to develop their own learning strategies, which they can then apply in other situations (Soifer, Young, and Irwin 1989).

Project Literacy United States (PLUS)

PLUS is a federal program that has as its ultimate goal the elimination of illiteracy in the U.S. Each program funded by PLUS is designed to meet the needs of the local adult illiterate population. For instance, the PLUS program in Alabama emphasizes the success of its adult learners. Focusing on the successes of adult learners is encouraging not only to their peers but to the tutors as well.

Fay Turner, a literacy instructor at a community college, tells of Melody, an unemployed welfare mother in the PLUS program in Alabama. After joining the program, Melody eventually was able to gain employment, became a registered voter, and now serves as a PTA volunteer. Melody continues in the program and is grateful that someone helped her learn to read, thus turning her life around. Another student in the Alabama PLUS program became an avid reader, picking up everything that came into the house. When he happened across a bill from a local department store for an expensive dress his wife had purchased, he confronted her; and she was forced to curtail her extravagant spending habits (Literacy Success Stories 1991).

Volunteer Efforts in Adult Literacy Programs

A vast number of literacy programs in the U.S. are sponsored by organizations that use volunteers as tutors. Two such volunteer organizations, serving more than 200,000 adults, are the Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach Literacy Action. The target group of these two organizations are primarily adults with little or no literacy skills.

Typically, volunteers receive less than 20 hours of training before they begin tutoring. The simple premise of volunteer literacy efforts

is that if an adult can read, then he or she can teach another adult to read. While volunteers may lack a lot of formal training, they tend to make up for it by their enthusiasm for and dedication to helping other adults. Fay Turner, a volunteer in the PLUS program in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, captures this enthusiasm when she says, "It is wonderful to be a part of people reaching out and helping each other. I am proud of the effect PLUS is having in my community" (Literacy Success Stories 1991).

Conclusions

Adult literacy programs vary widely with regard to their structure, funding, instructional methods, and their clientele. Federal and state governments each play an important role in funding and facilitating adult literacy programs. Perhaps the most successful programs are those staffed by volunteers, who find great satisfaction in helping another adult learn to read or to improve their limited reading skills. And, in return, they receive genuine expressions of appreciation for the help they have provided. Below is a poem shared by an adult student with her volunteer tutor. It captures her uncertainty and the tutor's persistence in encouraging her to learn to read and write:

Come to the cliff, he said.
They said, we are afraid.
Come to the cliff, he said.
They came.
He pushed them.
And they flew.
– Old French Poem

Eliminating adult illiteracy will require many more volunteers to work in local community programs. Through their efforts, illiterate adults will become proficient in the reading and writing skills needed to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem, to succeed on the job, and to live richer and fuller lives. When this happens, the whole community benefits.

To achieve literacy the illiterate adult first must be willing to seek help and to stay with the program long enough for improvement to occur. Tutors must be understanding and supportive. They must use the adult student's prior knowledge and experience and build on them so that the student achieves success at each step along the way.

As educators, we cannot ignore the problem of adult illiteracy in this nation. Many of these adults are failures of our educational system. So consider volunteering as a tutor in your local literacy program and make a difference in the lives of those who need a second chance.

Sources of Information About Adult Literacy

American Society for Training and Development
1630 Duke Street, Box 1443
Alexandria, VA 22313

Business Council for Effective Literacy
1221 Avenue of the Americas, 35th Floor
New York, NY 10020

Clearinghouse on Adult Education
U.S. Department of Education
Division of Adult Education
Mary E. Switzer Building, Room 4428
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202-7240

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and
Vocational Education Research
National Center for Research in Vocational Education
Ohio State University
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy
College of Education
Pennsylvania State University
248 Calder Way, Suite 307
State College, PA 16801

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139

Office of Education and Training Resources
School of Education
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405

PROJECT: LEARN
2238 Euclid Avenue
Cleveland, OH 44115

U.S. Department of Labor
Employment and Training Administration
Office of Public Information
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Room 52307
Washington, DC 20210

Local sources of information include community colleges, school districts, public libraries, and state departments of education.

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